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13 April 2014
Palm Sunday – Sunday of the Passion
Passion according to St. Matthew

In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Now. All is coming to a head now. Today. Tomorrow. This week. Jesus is both director and main actor.

"You two disciples there, go into the village in front of you down the road. Go now. You'll find a donkey with her colt. Untie them. Bring them to me. Now. Don't wait. Do so immediately. If anyone asks you anything, say, 'The Lord needs them.' The owners will do as you say. Go. Now."

There is no more holding back in Jesus' words. No more "Wait." No more, "This is not My time nor hour." Now is His time. Now is
the appointed hour. Now is He preparing to ride into Jerusalem for His greatest moment.

And Jerusalem is pumped. It's Passover Week. It's that one time of year when a male lamb is sacrificed by each family. The lamb's blood was caught and sprinkled by the priest at the altar. The lamb was taken home and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs and drunk with wine. Behold the shouts in Jerusalem from the Jewish masses to Jesus, the Lamb of God. "Hosanna!" "Alleluia!" "Blessed!" Male voices. Female voices. Children's voices. All voices directed at the Man on the back of the little donkey-colt!

However, some hate-filled Jews (John 12:I 9) disliked this. Their voices put this spin on these events of this week: All the world is going after this man. Stupid people. They should be following us. They should be listening us, not Him. This man is an ego **maniac**.

Foolish Pharisees. Now is the time for Jesus. For indeed, He is the Lamb of God.

So, the holiest week begins in the City of David, in Zion. Scripture (Ps 99:2-4) is fulfilled with this Man, the Lord Jesus coming into Jerusalem: *Great is the Lord in Zion; He is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise Your great and awesome name. He is holy. The King is mighty.*

But it's just the beginning. After the King's raucous entrance into Zion, the week gets more intense. Next day, Jesus returns to Zion, to the Temple. The Passover collection for the Temple Tax had already begun. Birds and animals were being sold in the Court of the Gentiles, not outside the Temple on the city streets. Jesus overturns the tables of the money-changers and the stools of the pigeon sellers, because, as Scripture (Is 56:7) says, *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."* On that same day, in that same Temple, Jesus performs miracles. He heals. The blind. The lame. Little Jewish children are now singing praises all through the pillared courts. Yesterday these praises were out on the streets. "Hosanna to the Son of David." Oh what lovely anthems to Jesus in the House of Prayer!

But again, others are not so enthralled. Jewish chief priests take offense. They want the children stopped. But Jesus quotes Scripture (Ps 8:2) to them:

*Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
You [Lord] have prepared praise!*

Next day, Jesus is back in the House of Prayer. He's confronted again by the chief priests. "By what authority are you doing these things?" They already know His answer. They know that He will claim to have authority from God. They know too, He must be stopped. They have already hired the traitor Judas. They gave him thirty pieces of silver. And again, there's Scripture (Zechariah II:12, 13) being fulfilled, Zechariah wrote, *If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages. So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.....that princely price set on [God's Lamb].*

Yes, everything that happens this week was foretold, ordained and predicted for God's Lamb. It was happening, now. Jesus knew it, as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 12:27) after the Last Supper, *Now my heart is troubled and what shall I say, "Father, save Me from this hour?" No. It was for this very reason I came to this hour.*

So what shall we say? What do we make of this hour, this week, this "now?" Is this all just ancient history? Are these just bygone events with no further effects, consequences or results? Are all of our Holy Week services rite and ritual, pomp and circumstance? Is the church nothing more than an historical society trying to keep alive a past that no one really cares about?

Never! No detail of the last week of the life of our Lord is too inconsequential. Nothing is minutiae. Remember that night of this week when Jesus was at the house of Simon the leper (John 26:6ff.) and the woman came up to him and anointed His head with a very costly and fragrant oil? The disciples complain. O, the waste! Jesus commends. *Wherever [the] Gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.*

All things happen for the sake of the Gospel. All happens so that good news might be applied to evil hearts and wicked ways. All happens so that you and I, and anyone else who hears and believes in Jesus, might be saved.

You and I, yea the whole world, need saving. All flesh is flesh. All flesh sins. Greedy hands love money. Lustful eyes look beyond the

marriage bed. Haughty hearts covet a bigger piece of the banking pie, the real estate pie, the government pie. Unforgiving consciences still unforgiving after that which happened 30 years ago. Paul says that *those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.* You and I have been baptized. We have been born of the Spirit. Therefore, we live according to the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death. To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:5-8).

You and I will keep on celebrating this week every year of our lives. There is no more important a week to remember. It is the week upon which all history, past, present and future, rests. If Jesus didn't die on the cross for sin, you and I are most to be pitied. If Jesus didn't hang on the cross enduring pain, then one repentant thief was tricked out of paradise.

If Jesus wasn't suspended from two pieces of wood, then our real enemies are not sin and death, but mass murderers like Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Ili Amin and Ho Chi Minh. If Jesus wasn't cursed by being placed on a tree to set us free, then our true freedom comes from governments or the media or armies or world courts.

Let the Gospel be preached. Let Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sin be shouted from pulpits and housetops. Let the world know that One Man is the Mediator between God and men. Let the world hear that Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Let the world understand that he who believes in the Son has everlasting life. Now. Today.

The Jesus, who was born of the historical woman Mary and who was crucified under the rule of Herod in Galilee and Pontius Pilate in Judea, suffered. He died. His body was removed from the timbers; wrapped in a linen cloth; laid in a rich man's tomb; door sealed in Roman style. And then, raised from the dead on the third day. Not even a speck of decay! Every detail predicted, ordained. Every detail worked out by God the Father. Every detail for us and for our salvation. Every detail so that you and I may have life and peace.

And now, today, for us, God's detailing continues. He brings us life, peace and forgiveness. He has worked it out so that the blood and body of Jesus on the cross come to us. Now. Today. You eat. You drink. Bread, wine. Body, blood. How is this physically possible? I don't know. God calls the shots. His Word says what it is, and nothing is impossible with God. Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. Today. And this Wednesday night. And Thursday night. And Friday night. And Saturday night and early next Sunday morning.

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.
In the name of the Father, Son + and Holy Ghost. Amen.